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A SERMON

PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

MRS. ETTA MAY PARLIN,

IN BAKERSFIELD, VT., JULY 2, 1888,

By REV. J. K. FULLER.

—GOD'S SUFFICIENT GRACE.—

“My Grace is Sufficient for Thee.”—II COR. 12: 9.

Paul was a mighty man in thought, word and deed. It was no ordinary affliction that he was called upon to bear. Whatever the “thorn” that caused him to cry out for its removal this only was the answer: “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

There are many things in our lives as well as in his which to experience is like a thorn driven into the quivering flesh: bodily infirmities, poverty, broken friendships and many other ills are of this nature.

But a “thorn” more painful than any other is the loss by death of a true and tried friend. This is a loss which inflicts pain and sorrow at times seemingly unendurable. When disease is doing its fatal work upon our kindred and friends we pray, oh so earnestly, that they may be spared to us. But our prayers do not save the sick. They waste away before our eyes as if there were no God.

We think we cannot live without them, they die and we weep like Rachel. We will not, cannot be comforted, and in the wild, restless tumult of the soul, we do not hear God's voice above the tempest, saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

This grace, however, is given and is sufficient; and afterwards we come to realize it, and what we deemed the shipwreck of life proves the salvation of the soul.



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Do you ever stop to think what our dead do for us? Not as often as you think, "what a comfort and support they would have been if they had not died." If they had only lived we might have had this or that ideal in life satisfied.

Ah! that is an unknown thing. Do all the living add to our comfort and success? And what proof have we that they who have been received to everlasting habitations will do less for us now than when in this life they ministered to our needs and desires? Nay. We have good reason to believe that the very best work done for us and for this world is done through and by the personal influence of the dead.

What, let me ask, is it that gives efficiency to the work of life; what is it that enables us to endure, that revives fainting souls by the roadside of life—what? What but the thought of loved ones gone before.

We do not realize as we ought their unconscious influence upon us. Some of us have as many friends gone before us as we have left with us. Are they of less consequence—less able to assist us than those about us?

Says one—"When death takes away one on whom we have leaned or to whom we have looked up, or with whom we have toiled and endured and joyed, or for whom we have had care and responsibility, we recognize the mystery, and we feel the sorrow of the event, while at the same time we are ready to believe that it is better for that dear one in the new sphere of existence than it would have been here." We believe that God makes no mistakes. Such as are fitted and prepared for great usefulness on earth, but are cut off before they have time or opportunity for their work, are not by reason of death denied the privilege of serving God or humanity. Somewhere and somehow we believe they serve and glorify God, in tireless activity.

We have no fears for them, but we are tempted to say "they can do no more for us." Nay, they can do that which they could never do in the flesh.

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Says the same writer already quoted:—"Some of the saintly faces of fathers and mothers, which are a benediction to all who look at them, could never have shone as now with the reflected light of heaven, unless they had been summoned to frequent upward lookings through the clouds, in loving communion with their children in heaven. There are manly and womanly children, who are more serious and earnest and devoted in their young life-struggles, because of their constant sense of the over-watching presence of their dead parents. Many a mature life has more of symmetry, and more of strength and beauty, as a result of the chastened and hallowed memories of an early great sorrow through bereavement, which seemed as if it would utterly crush the young heart, but which really gave to that heart an unfailing tenderness of sympathy, and a limitless capacity for clinging devotedness, which would have been an impossibility with less of a trial through death. And so the dead live on here, for, and with, and in, those who mourn and remember them as gone hence forever.

"Our living friends do much for us, but perhaps our dead friends do yet more. We do what we can for our friends while we live; but possibly, if we were to die, we could be more of a help and more of an inspiration to those who are dearer than life to us. Cardinal Newman voices this thought tenderly, when he says of the grief and the gain of David in the death of his peerless friend, Jonathan :

"Yet it was well :—for so, 'mid cares of rule
And crime's encircling tide,
A spell was o'er thee, zealous one, to cool
Earth-joy and kingly pride ;
With battle-scene and pageant, prompt to blend
The pale calm spectre of a blameless friend.

"Ah! had he lived, before thy throne to stand,
Thy spirit keen and high
Sure it had snapped in twain love's slender band,
So dear in memory ;
Paul, of his comrade reft, the warning gives,—
He lives to us who dies; he is but lost who lives."

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“ And when Jesus himself was about to die, he distinctly assured his loved disciples, that he could do more for them after his death than he could do by continuing to live with them here in the flesh. ‘ Because I have spoken this thing unto you, sorrow has filled your heart,’ he said. ‘ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth ; it is expedient for you that I go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I go, I will send him unto you.’ There is a sense in which this truth applies to every follower of Jesus, as it applied to Jesus himself. There is a peculiar spiritual influence of redeemed souls over their dear ones still on earth, which cannot be exercised except as a result of death.”

“ They never quite leave us, our friends who have passed
Through the shadows of death to the sunlight above ;
A thousand sweet memories are holding them fast
To the places they blest with their presence and love.

“ The work which they left, and the books which they read,
Speak mutely, though still with an eloquence rare ;
And the songs that they sung, the dear words that they said,
Yet linger and sigh on the desolate air.

“ And oft when alone, and as oft in the throng,
Or when evil allures us, or sin draweth nigh,
A whisper comes gently, ‘ Nay, do not the wrong ;’
And we feel that our weakness is pitied on high.”

“ It is not that we should be unwilling to live on, doing our best for our dear ones here ; because of the possibility of our doing yet more for them through our dying. Nor yet is it, that we should part from our dear ones without a pang of sorrow, when they are called away by death ; because their dying will bring them added joy and larger influence, and may give them more power for good over our own lives, as we continue our earthly course without their visible companionship. But it is that, in our thought of being taken away from those whom we love, we need not feel that we shall thereby be lost to all possibility of loving ministry to their comfort and welfare ; and that in the bitterness of our keenest grief over the death of our loved ones, there may be the consoling

thought that we do not lose the stimulus and the inspiration of their memories, nor part, even for the time being, with the more sacred influence of their example, and of their spiritual fellowship.”

What better way of conveying grace to the wounded and bleeding souls of men than that of spiritual fellowship and communion with the memory of the absent ones. Are they not as the angels of God? So says Christ. Are not the angels ministering spirits? Paul teaches this.

Then here is comfort and strength, which is the grace of God to our souls, coming direct from the dead—yet not dead, but like their example, Christ, alive forevermore.

I should have fainted in the work in which I have been engaged in far back in the past if I had received no help but from the living. I should shrink back aghast to-day if I had no sources of strength for the future but such as come from the living. Mighty and indispensable as are the inspirations of the living, yet more and more must you and I feel the power of the invisible host which, like “clouds of witnesses, hold us in full survey.” Because of these if for no other reason we must forget the joys and sorrows of the past and the present and onward urge our way. It is no less God’s voice to us, because it seems the voices of those who once pressed heart and hand to our throbbing temples. Grace is no less grace because it comes through angelic spirits. Grace is grace though you connect it with spiritual and natural causes.

Human sympathy is the grace of God, which enables the soul of man to endure. Love, courtesy, kindness, all are God’s grace to the sorrowing heart. God may, by direct communication, flash his grace into the broken spirit, but more likely through some other human being. The process of healing the hurt of the soul is by natural law—not magic or enchantment.

This grace of God is seen in many natural ways. When a man’s heart is overwhelmed and he cries to be led to the rock that is higher than he, is the sorrow removed at once? Ofttimes it

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is not removed at all; neither is grace given in a moment. The grace of God is not a drug with which to stupefy the soul in its troubles. Recovery from a severe shock is slow and gradual—the remedy is for healing and building up. A long time may elapse between the prayer and the answer thereto. So slow is the work oftentimes that many a righteous soul doubts if his prayers are answered or whether there be any God who cares for him at all.

Hence, time is the grace of God—“No chastening seemeth to be joyous.” It cannot be. The grace of God does not take away the bitter pain and agony of the loss and the loneliness. “Nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness.”

God summons to his aid natural sleep. This is his grace—His sweet restorer. How it does dispel the illusion and fears of our waking hours; how it refreshes and invigorates the whole man till the soul rises out of its griefs, having shaken off the chill and the gloom, and with mightier faith and a holier zeal it challenges the world, the flesh, or the devil to do it harm. With his eye fixed on Alpine heights, his soul throbbing with the pulsations of immortal life, like a soldier in the heat of battle he presses on through fire and smoke and blood at the call of duty. The grace of God, coming from so many sources, has proved sufficient for the thorn in the flesh, and a greater inspiration and force than one's own prayers.

My brother, we are fighting spiritual battles above the clouds. We are wounded and bleeding; the thorn of a cruel world and broken friendship—private and public sorrows lacerate the soul and we cry out in pain and distress, saying, let this “thorn” be removed; let this “cup” pass.

Will the grace of God be sufficient? Yes, it will.

God's laws shall be observed, the darkest shadow and the deadliest peril shall not only lose their power but through the conflict and the victory we shall be clothed with more and more of that invisible and eternal force which has been the triumph and glory of the martyrs of all ages.

VII

REMARKS.

I can hardly trust myself to speak of the life and early death of Mrs. Parlin.

Servants of the public have so much in common that they seem to me like brothers and sisters,—certainly when in mutual sympathy they pray and labor for the same ideals.

At best the lives of such are full of perplexity and unusual burden.

To sicken and die away from home and kindred faces is no small part of the pain of public life. Kind friends may be and are found, yet the dear old home and family church-yard make even death seem more like going home than dying and being buried in a strange land.

There is something inexpressibly sweet and sad in the history of this young soul. First, the beauty and power of conjugal love—the dearest, strongest tie that binds human souls in one. The forsaking of all others and cleaving unto one, even though it involves the loss of father and mother. Grand as that deathless vow of Ruth's, as she declares allegiance to Naomi and her God, is the vow of a true woman's love. "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." There you have the soul of woman laid open. But let no man treat lightly such devotion, and let no husband wonder why his presence is joy or his absence sorrow to the wife of his bosom. Neither let an unfeeling world marvel why this mother sought burial by the side of her sleeping

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babes, and where her husband's footsteps may tread softly above her grave.

A few years ago she came to us full of life, ambition and hope, well qualified for a life of usefulness. Her departure, so like an untimely frost, striking her down before midlife, is one of the secret things which belong to the Lord.

But she has escaped a world of sorrow, and is already "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."



